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ABSTRACT

A growing movement to improve the quality of teaching has been called "faculty development." It is based on three assumptions: the primary professional activity of most faculty is teaching; instructional behaviors are learned skills, attitudes, and goals; and faculty can be taught how to improve their classroom performance. Interest in faculty development programs is primarily linked to a tight job market for professors. Faculty development centers are usually led by a chief instructional officer holding dean or vice-president rank. Four popular approaches to faculty development are: financial incentives; lecture and discussion groups focusing on higher education issues and faculty concerns in teaching; inservice courses and workshops dealing with the improvement of specific instructional skills; and feedback programs designed to identify teaching skills needing improvement. Programs that utilize these approaches at different universities are described. Reasons are cited for limited participation in and benefit from faculty development programs. Few centers have developed evaluation procedures, and consequently there is little evidence of their success or failure. (SW)

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Faculty Development: The American Experience

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Faculty Development: The American Experience

Peter Seldin

'Faculty development' is one of the newer additions to the lexicon of American higher education. As a catch phrase, it describes the growing movement to improve the quality of teaching that has swept over 500 campuses. Interest in faculty development has been nothing less than intense. It is marked by overflow crowds of faculty and administrators at national and regional conferences. It evokes unusual financial support from major foundations and government agencies. Typically, it resulted in a complete sellout - in just 8 weeks - of a how-to-do-it handbook on faculty development.

The concept of faculty development is hardly new. Years ago its emphasis was to improve subject matter competence. Sabbatical leaves, guest lectures, attendance at professional meetings had as rationale a greater understanding of the content of a discipline. Practically no attention was paid to how that understanding could best be imparted to students. This early approach to faculty development in the USA now has been turned around. Today the concept is based on three assumptions: first, the primary professional activity of most faculty is teaching; second, instructional behaviour is not inborn but, instead, is a learned web of skills, attitudes and goals; third, faculty can be taught how to improve their classroom performance. Jerry Gaff, Director of the Project for Institutional Renewal Through Improvement in Teaching, in Washington, DC, has said that faculty development is "part of the professional responsibility to grow."

What triggered the new movement, the changed emphasis? Student activism on campus was an early pressure point. New educational techniques plus recognition of the validity of different teaching styles also contributed. Aroused state legislatures across the nation added to the demand for teaching accountability. Ever more faculty were asking for help, having discovered that their on the job training was insufficient to compensate for the minimal or nonexistent preparation for college teaching they had received in graduate school. As Bert Biles, Director of the National Centre on Faculty Evaluation and Development at Kansas State University, said, "The faculty do care about their teaching."

But the sudden interest in faculty development programmes is primarily linked to the tight job market for professors. Sharp drops in funding and student enrollment have sharply curtailed faculty job mobility. Colleges no longer can afford the luxury of hiring new faculty to infuse fresh ideas, innovative leadership and new teaching techniques. Inevitably, therefore, the pressure was on to introduce programmes to develop the instructional capabilities of the college's faculty.

Some educational observers consider the upsurge in faculty development programmes as a passing fad. Mostly, however, the movement is viewed as a long overdue effort to upgrade the mediocre teaching that for years has been the unfortunate hallmark of academica. Whatever the motivation, in-service instructional development programmes today are operating on college campuses everywhere. All kinds of institutions are involved - public and private, independent, state and church related, community colleges and professional schools - and they are found in every geographic region. Consortia, such as the 13 member Associated Colleges of the Midwest or the 4 member Consortium of East Jersey (New Jersey), have been particularly active.

The nomenclature and content of the faculty development centres (also called programmes, projects, clinics, offices) may vary from institution to institution, but they share a common goal - to develop faculty teaching competence. Typically, a faculty development centre is led by a chief instructional officer holding dean or vice-president rank. A centre staff can range from two (the instructional developer and full time secretary) at Howard Community College (Maryland) to nearly thirty (including professional staff, graduate students who carry the title teaching improvement specialists, and secretarial staff) at the Clinic to Improve University Teaching, University of Massachusetts, at Amherst.

According to preliminary data developed by Jerry Gaff, a researcher who conducted an Exxon Education Foundation Study, the median budgets for the centres for the 1973-74 academic year were $50-100,000 with 78% of the budgets consisting of 'hard' money. Some of the programmes have been financed by grants from the federal government's Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education or the Advanced Institutional Development Programme. Others have received substantial grants from major foundations, including Exxon, Danforth, Lilly, Kellogg - the last named funding, among others, the new national centre for faculty development, located at Kansas State University.

Not surprisingly, although instructional improvement is the expressed goal of faculty development programmes, in the pursuit of this goal the programmes vary greatly. The differences stem from differing intellectual traditions, budgets and staff expertise. Moreover, there is the thorny matter of definition: exactly what is it that makes a faculty member a better teacher? Gearing their instruction to different approaches to this definition has led the faculty development centres to adopt divergent programmes. Yet despite the differences, four popular approaches to faculty development can be recognised. They are (1) financial incentive programmes for faculty, (2) lectures and discussion groups, focusing on broad issues of higher education and common faculty concerns in teaching, (3) in-service courses and workshops dealing with the improvement of specific instructional skills, (4) feedback programmes designed to identify teaching skills in need of improvement by scrutiny of actual teaching behaviours. Many faculty development centres rely on various combinations of these approaches to improve the teaching competency of their faculty. The Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan, for example, employs all four approaches.

The first approach to faculty development encourages faculty to devise innovative instructional methods through a system of small competitive faculty grants or teaching released time. Programme budgets vary considerably. Black Hawk College (Illinois), on the one hand, funded 11 faculty projects at a cost of $12,690 for the 1974-75 academic year, while the City University System (New York City) awarded in the same academic year 8 grants totalling $291,388. For the current year, however, "because of the budget crisis, no new funds were awarded," noted Marie A Miller, Assistant to the Dean for University and Special Programmes. Topics, too, vary considerably. Among the faculty projects approved for funding at just one institution, for example, were: 'A Videotape Modular Approach to the Instruction of Practical Spanish,'

'Application and Evaluation of Research on Innovative Teaching of Basic Writing,' 'Development of a Communication Skill Training Course,' and 'A Competency Based Micro-teaching Programme for the Preparation of Teachers.'

The second approach to faculty development, as mentioned, is concerned with broad issues of contemporary higher education. In this approach by means of symposia, conferences, lectures by 'outside experts', attention is focused on topics such as the condition of undergraduate education and the changing role of the college professor. For example, a conference last year at the University of California, in Berkeley, on the general theme of alternatives to the lecture method was led by a representative from the Personalised Student Instruction Centre at Georgetown University (Washington). Similarly, John Silber, President of Boston University, was invited by Western Michigan University to discuss the current concern with college grades and grading systems.

To bring developments in instruction and post-secondary education to their faculties, institutions such as the University of Texas at Arlington and the University of Michigan developed resource centres and mini libraries housing books, periodicals, catalogues, and newsletters, relating to the improvement of teaching performance. Other institutions subsidise faculty subscriptions to educational journals such as the *Journal of Higher Education* and *Change Magazine*. More than 25 faculty development centres publish newsletters with articles on the improvement of teaching. The January 1976 issue of the *University of Kentucky Teaching News and Notes*, for example, contains articles on simulation or game playing as applied to anthropology, teaching as communication, and nontraditional teaching techniques designed for a programme to prepare students for careers in merchandising. Although primarily intended for internal use, many newsletters are circulated nationally by subscription.

Developing instructional skills by in-service courses and workshops is the third popular approach to improving classroom performance. Emphasising the acquisition of general knowledge about different teaching methods, such as lecture, small group learning experience, self paced learning, games, simulation, peer teaching, this approach aims to get each faculty participant to learn the different techniques, how they work, when and where to use them. The new information is then translated into skill by practical exercises during which the faculty 'teach' mini courses to their colleagues.

At the Faculty Development Resource Centre in the University of Texas, Arlington, seminars, short courses and workshops are widely used. Their subject matter includes instructional television, computer assisted instruction, simulation and gaming, group interaction techniques, personalised student instruction, micro-teaching laboratories, preparation of instructional objectives, team teaching, the inquiry approach. Faculty attendance at these in-service sessions has ranged from 25 to 250. The University of Cincinnati's Institute for Research and Training in Higher Education offers teaching and learning seminars for university faculty on subjects such as improving lecturing, the use of low cost or no cost media ideas, the Keller Plan, peer teaching and the teaching of large classes. Also relating to the teaching and learning process but broader in content have been the topical workshops at Mars Hill College (North Carolina) which dealt with 'theories of knowledge,' 'group facilitation skills' and 'integrated skills essential for transference of learning.'

Some institutions augment their workshops by preparing printed material. The Division of Instructional Communication at Western Michigan University, for example, has developed a booklet describing computer simulated experiments, the university computer centre, and the computer as an aid to teaching. All these fit well with the institution's workshops on computer assisted and managed instruction.

Like many other institutions, Virginia Commonwealth University promotes instructional improvement by a wide offering of short in-service courses and workshop But unlike programmes elsewhere, its Centre for Improving Teaching Effectiveness works closely with department chairmen to help develop their competence as facilitators of teaching improvement in their own departments. Available to chairmen as workshop topics are 'Peer Visitation of Classes,' 'Improving Advising,' 'Setting up Departmental Teaching Laboratories,' and 'Giving Helpful Feedback to Teachers on their Teaching.'

Several medical schools have adopted courses and workshops to improve faculty teaching. The Association of American Medical Colleges (Washington DC) has gone so far as to establish a Division of Faculty Development. Its goal is to stimulate faculty in educational courses and to enhance instructional capability by faculty skill development. Short (2-4 days) intensive workshops deal with different teaching methods. At Michigan's Wayne State University Medical School seminars on general topics - 'Humanistic Issues in Medical Education'

and 'Goals of Medical Education' - and specific topics - teaching techniques, instructional use of videotapes and development of lecture skills - are offered.

Among the faculty development programmes using skill development seminars and workshops, perhaps the best known are the Centre for Research on Learning and Teaching, at the University of Michigan; Teaching Innovation and Evaluation Services, at the University of California at Berkeley; and the Centre for the Teaching Professions, at Northwestern University.

The fourth approach to faculty development in America rests on the premise that teaching improvement is facilitated by giving feedback to faculty on their teaching performance. This approach is particularly advantageous for faculty needing more individual help than can be obtained from seminars, workshops and short courses. Feedback sources vary with faculty development centres, but generally used are student ratings, videotapes of performance, and classroom observers. Kansas State's Centre for Faculty Evaluation and Development in Higher Education leans heavily on student ratings on ten specific teaching objectives defined by their professors as educationally important. Student ratings are also solicited on twenty specific classroom teaching techniques. By comparing the techniques used with the objectives desired, as noted in the student ratings, areas of classroom teaching performance in need of improvement can be identified. A major strength of the Kansas State programme is that personal instructional improvement is tied directly to student evaluation.

The Teaching Resources Centre at the University of California, Davis, uses a computer evaluation service to improve faculty instruction by a feedback of student ratings. Used in conjunction with video feedback, those teaching skills in need of strengthening are identified.

Widely knows is the faculty development programme of the Clinic to Improve University Teaching, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Teachers requesting assistance from the Clinic work one-to-one with teaching improvement specialists. This programme commences with an assessment of teaching performance. Feedback on this performance comes from many sources; a sample of instructional material, classroom observation, a videotaped classroom session, student evaluation, instructor self assessment. Analysed by the teaching improvement specialist - a graduate student trained by the Clinic - the faculty member (called the 'client') is made aware of those teaching skills in need of improvement. A short or long range improvement strategy is planned. The faculty member, guided by the teaching improvement specialist, selects

the strategic plan best suited to his own needs. He has a wide area from which to select his plan: micro-teaching (the basic sequence of teaching, analysis, and reteaching with the focus on a specific teaching skill, ie probing questions), videotape training, resource materials, continuous feedback from students on audiotapes, learning tests or specially designed questionnaires, role playing and simulation, and repeated monitoring strategies using small tape recorders. In addition, frequent developmental sessions with the teaching improvement specialist are scheduled. Later, data are collected to measure progress. If necessary, further teaching improvement strategies are selected and implemented.

How has the faculty responded to the efforts around the nation to develop their teaching competence? As indicated in a recent study of faculty development programmes by Jerry Gaff for the Exxon Educational Foundation, an estimated only 22% of the faculties gained 'considerable benefit' from the programmes, assessment by the directors of the centres. Suggested reasons for this modest achievement are varied. First, the belief is embedded in many faculty that only someone knowledgable in a subject can talk meaningfully about teaching that subject. "You have to know my discipline to appreciate the problems in teaching it," said a Virginia professor. Second, some faculty stay away from the faculty development centre because they believe the money spent on the centre should have been spent on faculty salaries. Third, some faculty are committed to traditional ways of doing things and resist the introduction of new methods. "Why should I try new ways of teaching after 23 years of lecturing? I don't want to teach any other way," said a Wisconsin professor. Fourth, many faculty have yet to be motivated to cross the threshold of a faculty development centre. Inertia more than opposition has kept them on the sidelines.

Whatever the reasons, however, it is clear that most college professors have stayed away from the improvement centres on campus. This will come as no surprise, nor will it discourage proponents of the centres. Faculty development programmes are relatively new, modestly staffed and budgeted, and limited in their promotional outreach to professors. Proponents point to their successes, to the greater skill, confidence and interest engendered in faculty willing to work with the centres. For example:

"I've always felt I was a mediocre lecturer. The workshop taught me how to be more effective in the classroom with small group discussions" - a Nebraska professor.

"The institute ran a sympsium on'The Role of the Professor Today' "It was the first time I'd ever really thought about it" - a California professor.

"The university funded my proposal to develop a cross-disciplinary approach to teaching the humanities. The students profited. I have too. I've worked closely with other departments and I've gained greater insight into their disciplines" - a New York professor.

"The centre taught me what I never learned in graduate school *how* to lecture effectively" - a Kansas professor.

"When I first saw the videotape I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. My arms were flapping up and down like a bird. I frowned and I actually looked unhappy. It was a shock to see myself as students saw me" a Massachusetts professor.

"My personal experience with the programme was good. Perhaps the best part was the microteaching. I could try new teaching methods without risking classroom failure" - a Florida professor.

In terms of fair reporting, it must be pointed out that some faculty emerge from the improvement programmes with less than the quoted enthusiasm. Some programmes are neither well planned nor well executed. Some training specialists could use more training, and at times the use of data relating to teacher competence has been used for academic personnel decisions rather than teaching improvement. But the most successful American faculty development programmes seem to have certain characteristics in common. The directors previously have been fulltime teachers themselves, although they arrive from different disciplines. They have been endowed by the university with clearly defined responsibility and authority, and they provide strong leadership on campus. They know how to make effective use of budgets and how to spot and enlist support on campus. They have learned how to work effectively with media centres,with faculty governing bodies, and with faculty advisory committees. And the most successful faculty development programmes flourish on campuses where outstanding teaching is both recognised and rewarded.

Regrettably, because of the speed with which many programmes have been started, very few centres have built careful evaluation procedures into their programmes, the result is that few centres have measurable evidence of their success or failure. A self study at one institution found that "faculty members and their students perceived the teaching improvement process as resulting in positive changes." But substantive assessment demands more direct

evidence of consequent behavioral change as well as determination of the impact of any such change on desired student outcomes. As Albert Smith, editor of *Faculty Development and Evaluation in Higher Education* has said, "There is a lot of bragging about progress, but it's based on impressions rather than hard data." In a time of diminishing budgets this lack can have a serious consequence. For survival's sake alone, those centres operating without integral evaluation procedures should take steps to remedy that defect immediately. More important, the degree of programme effectiveness can then be continuously measured and improved. Until then, the effect of instructional improvement programmes will be in some dispute and remain unresolved. Even so, many in higher education accept as a benefit the new and widespread interest in the teaching process. That in itself is a long overdue step forward.